

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN McCAIN  
CHAIRMAN, SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION  
FULL COMMITTEE HEARING  
EFFECTIVENESS OF DOT'S OFFICE OF MOTOR CARRIERS & HIGHWAY SAFETY  
APRIL 27, 1999

- Last November, I asked the Department of Transportation's Inspector General (IG) to analyze a proposal that had been advanced in the House to transfer the then Office of Motor Carriers (OMC) from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The proposal was supported by the Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation who was, and is, concerned about OMC's effectiveness in overseeing the safety of our nation's truck and bus industries. I share that concern. Clearly, the effectiveness of OMC is critical.
- When the change in law was proposed, I expressed concerns over the transfer when it unexpectedly appeared as a line item in early drafts of the Omnibus Appropriations Conference Report, even though it had not been included in any House or Senate-passed legislation. Moreover, it had never been considered by any of the authorizing Committees of jurisdiction, nor had the proposal even been raised during our nearly two-years work to reauthorize the multi-year highway funding and safety programs. I felt it very important that we first determine whether NHTSA is the best place to oversee truck safety before requiring it to take on such critical yet unfamiliar responsibilities with the stroke of a pen.
- I want to be clear, however, that I have great admiration and appreciation for the good work that occurs at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, under the very able leadership of Dr. Rick Martinez. But I strongly believe we need to determine where motor carrier safety responsibilities can best be carried out before we legislate substantial organizational changes. I want to be clear that I have not foreclosed any organizational options at this point.
- I wanted the IG's involvement in this issue because I, like most of my colleagues, have tremendous respect for Ken Mead's judgment and independence. The Committee is very interested in hearing the IG's views on whether moving motor carrier safety functions to NHTSA will assure the attention and strong leadership necessary to carry out these important functions. Or, perhaps other organizational or programmatic changes could better improve motor carrier safety?
- I regret that Secretary Slater's schedule precluded him from testifying today. His

office informed the Committee last week that he would be unable to appear until sometime in mid-May. I believe the Committee would have greatly benefitted from the Secretary's perspective since he has had direct involvement with the federal motor carrier safety programs for more than six years, having served as the FHWA Administrator and now as Secretary. His views on the IG's findings are a crucial element in this debate and I look forward to learning what actions he will take to implement the IG's recommendations to improve safety.

- And while we are speaking of safety, I would be remiss if I didn't take a moment to express my general disappointment over the President's budget submission for the Department for fiscal year 2000. While we constantly hear that safety is the department's "top priority," why then would the Administration's budget propose to allocate more money to environmental protection programs at DOT than to safety programs? Their budget simply does not back up their claims and I would hope that when we do hear from the Secretary, he will directly address this matter.
- Of the \$50.5 billion proposed for transportation, a mere \$3.4 billion is dedicated for safety across all modes, while \$3.9 billion is proposed for DOT's environmental programs. Moreover, the money for the environment is "all accounted for" in budget jargon, versus the questionable user fee schemes the Administration has proposed to pay for many safety activities, including NTSB accident investigations and FRA safety inspections. As I've said before, I find this outrageous.
- Let me also mention that I will be managing the Y2K legislation on the floor this morning. Therefore, I ask the witnesses to please do their best to abbreviate their oral testimony from the usual 5-minute allotment so that we can complete the hearing before I have to go to the floor. I assure you, however, your written comments will be made part of the record.
- I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses and am eager to hear their views on what actions Congress and the Department should take to improve safety on our nation's roads and highways.